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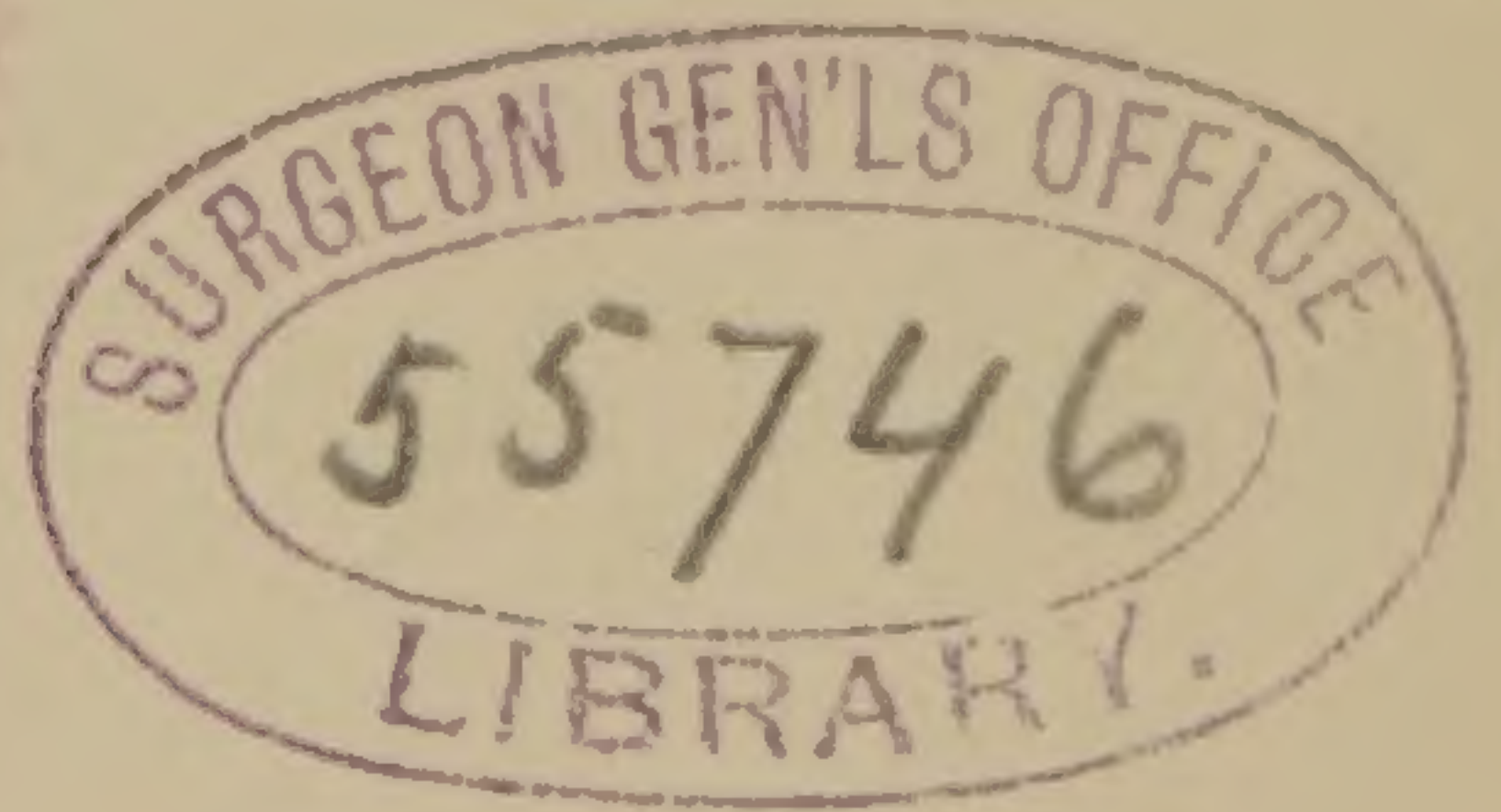
WILLIAM C. ROBERTS, M.D.,

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE, ETC.

BY

GOUVERNEUR M. SMITH, M.D.

*READ BEFORE THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE,
THURSDAY EVENING, APRIL 2d, 1874.*



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GOUVERNEUR M. SMITH, M.D.

NEW YORK, APRIL 18th, 1874.

DEAR SIR :—

We are desirous to preserve the Memoir of our cherished friend and family physician, the late WM. C. ROBERTS, M.D., prepared by yourself with so much care and discrimination, and read before the New York Academy of Medicine on the evening of the 2d inst. With this object, we beg to ask that you will give us the use of your manuscript for publication.

We are, very truly yours,

WILLIAM F. OWENS.
WILLIAM H. PRICE.
L. P. BAYNE.
JOHN LEFOY BROWER.
SYLVESTER BRUSH.
F. F. GUNTHER.
ROBERT DUNLAP.
A. M. CLEISH.
THOS. W. S. MIDDLETON.

NEW YORK, APRIL 27th, 1874.

MESSRS. WILLIAM F. OWENS, WM. H. PRICE AND OTHERS.

GENTLEMEN :—

Your polite communication of the 18th inst., requesting for publication the memoir of the late WILLIAM C. ROBERTS, M.D., which, by appointment, I read before the New York Academy of Medicine on the 2d inst., I duly received.

The Academy reserves its Transactions for scientific papers. Any Memoirs of its Fellows are preserved in a prescribed manuscript form, in its archives, and, if printed, are published at private expense.

I consequently take pleasure in acceding to your request, which is prompted by such affectionate regard for the deceased, and can only express regret that a want of time has prevented the preparation of a more suitable eulogium.

I am, Gentlemen, very respectfully yours,

GOUVERNEUR M. SMITH,

ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS:—

Reposing in the churchyard of an adjoining county—returning “ashes to ashes, dust to dust, earth to earth”—lie the remains of one who but a short time since was our active companion, co-operating with us in our various medical associations, and who, at the time of his decease, held next to the highest position in the gift of this Academy; I refer to our friend, the late Dr. William Currie Roberts.

No more shall we look upon his well-known and venerable form—a form stooping, and thus prematurely bent—not so much by the weight of an accumulation of years as by his close application to study, and by the crushing incubus of an early bereavement, and of later cares. On a former occasion, we have gathered with his relatives and friends within the sacred edifice of old St. Mark's, and have there paid the last tribute of respect to his mortal remains. To-night we gather in our own hall; the shrouded bier is not visible; the mournful dirge is not heard; but, without these funereal concomitants, we have come together to pay a tribute to those qualities of his head and heart, which were imperishable, as compared with that material form which was of the “earth, earthy.”

I can but wish that the duty which has been assigned to me of pronouncing his eulogium had devolved upon some abler and older Fellow—upon some senior mem-

ber of the profession, who had known him in his earlier life, who had observed him when an aspiring, adolescent tyro, and watched him through the progress of his manhood and incipient old age. While my acquaintance with Dr. Roberts dates back for quite a number of years, nevertheless my intimacy with him commenced when he had already passed the meridian of life, and when his steps were turned toward sunset. Time had already mellowed the hopes of his youth, and had tempered his earthly aspirations; but had in no degree dampened the fervor of his medical enthusiasm. We can all remember with what interest he listened to the various papers read before this Academy. With what intensity did he follow the thread of each discourse—premises and conclusions he eagerly caught, and a smile of approval indicated acquiescence with the speaker—but if perchance either illogical reasonings were presented, or errors in syntax and prosody were apparent, his countenance almost unconsciously betrayed mental uneasiness. The ear of Beethoven was neither more charmed by melody, nor disturbed by discord, than was the ear of our brother rejoiced by the harmonies of logic and rhetoric, and annoyed by incorrect reasonings and inelegancies of expression.

To depict the character of a friend, is a task most difficult. The description should bear such impression that contemporaries cognizant of facts can sanction its verity; the portrayal of mental qualities must be as truthful as a likeness when it leaves the easel of an accomplished artist. But the limner, as well as the biographer, has his difficult task to perform. It is recorded, that an eminent painter was requested to make

a likeness of Alexander the Great. The Macedonian conqueror in his wars, had received a sword wound upon his head, and on his forehead was a large and unsightly cicatrix. To give a representation of the scar, would be an offense to the admirers of the monarch; to omit it, would be to place on record artistic inaccuracy. Fertile in expedients, the painter represented the emperor leaning on his elbow, with his forefinger *on his brow*, in a meditative mood, and covering the scar. Thus, by ingenious attitudinal means, a faithful and happy portraiture was accomplished.

Idiosyncrasies and defects in character are natural to every individual—to give a memoir without alluding to them, is to violate the truth; if omitted, as errors are seen in all those who are living, the impression is conveyed that the good have all passed away, and the world is only inhabited by “miserable sinners.” And yet, so common is it to extol the dead, that it has come to be a trite saying, *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*.

Adulation of the dead is condemned by many, and has at times received striking reprobation. History informs us that centuries ago, Norman prelates, a multitude of clergy and people, and Prince Henry, gathered in solemn concourse in the Cathedral of St. Stephen, to celebrate the funeral rites of William the Conqueror. The mass had been performed, the Bishop had pronounced the panegyric, when a voice from the surging crowd exclaimed, “He whom you have praised, was a robber. The very land on which you stand is mine. By violence he took it from my father, and in the name of God, I forbid you to bury him in it.” After due consideration, the prelates paid to the speaker sixty shillings as a price for the grave,

with a promise of future reimbursement for the entire property, on which being done, the ceremony proceeded uninterrupted.

History affords few such incidents as the one just given, but how often are satirical smiles excited on hearing the virtues of the deceased, or on reading the epitaphs in cemeteries and churchyards. To such an extent has the latter means of eulogy excited derision, that Fletcher, in his "Spanish Curate," has ridiculed the custom by representing Diego, the sexton, as saying :

"I give five hundred pounds to buy a churchyard,
A spacious churchyard to lie thieves and knaves in :
Rich men and honest men take all the room up."

But, Mr. President, notwithstanding the difficulties inherently besetting a biographer, I will attempt a short sketch of the life of our friend, Dr. Roberts. His character will bear scrutiny, and in many respects was worthy of our emulation. A brief recital of his qualities will put on record why it was he gathered about him so many warmly-attached friends, why it was we elected him to such an honorable position, why it was that in such numbers we gathered over his bier, and why we have gathered to-night to give special heed to his memory.

The memoir presented this evening, has been prepared amid many interruptions. A want of revision in its order, thought, and expression, is apparent to myself, as it will be to my auditors, but the haste to complete it, must be an apology for its imperfections.

Dr. William Currie Roberts was born in London, England, September 9th, 1810. When about ten

years of age, he was brought to this country. His father here engaged in mercantile pursuits, but during the latter part of his life, was a clerk with Mr. J. J. Astor. His mother kept a school for young ladies; a school of high standing, which was patronized by a number of select New York families. The subject of our memoir was so early accustomed to American associations, that liberal and democratic ideas were readily engrafted upon his nature; and but few knew that he was of foreign birth. He was naturalized as a citizen of the United States, on the 5th of November, 1834. He proved a faithful citizen to the end of life, conscientiously performing public duties in connection with city office and patriotically serving the general government in an official position during the civil war. With interest he weighed the political issues which have agitated the country, and though not taking an active part in politics, nevertheless scrupulously pronounced his judgment with the ballot.

As a citizen, he was an example, not only to those of foreign birth, but also to ourselves.

Dr. Roberts did not enjoy the advantages of a collegiate education, but great attention was given to his mental training, and the facilities which he had for acquiring knowledge, were of such a high order, that his mind was early and richly cultivated. Having a retentive memory, he was enabled during his after life to enrich his conversation with many poetical, mythological and historical illustrations. This he could not have done had they not made an early impress on his thoughts. Similar impressions upon others during youth, make but too often an evanescent mark, being obliterated during maturer years, by those deeper

graven, which relate to the more practical matters of life.

To those who knew our friend only in his decadence, when he bestowed little attention to his toilet, and was even negligent in this regard, it may be surprising to learn that during adolescence he paid much regard to the neatness and jauntiness of his attire, and that the ladies were objects of his special admiration.

He early manifested a preference for professional life, and, while in his 19th year, selected the calling of a physician as his future vocation. On the 4th of October, 1828, he commenced the study of medicine, and entered the office of a distinguished surgeon, a gentleman who since that time has presided over this Academy, whose reputation was as widespread as it was deserving, and whose decease within the last decade we have been called upon to mourn. I refer to the late Dr. Valentine Mott.

The date we have given was an epoch in the history of the subject of our memoir, for it brought him into warm personal relations with one of the master spirits of our profession. The fire which animated the brilliant surgeon, served to enkindle enthusiasm in the breast of his medical pupil. The same spirit which subsequently prompted the surgeon while at Epidaurus to sacrifice a cock to Æsculapius, had fostered in young Roberts a love for his profession, which increased with his years, and which was only extinguished by death. But while we here put on record that the example and teachings of Mott helped to mould the animus of Roberts, we should here also antithetically, and as strongly record, that Mott was subsequently indebted to his diligent pupil and devotee, for

accretions to his reputation. The gifted pen of Roberts chronicled the surgical exploits of his preceptor, and the preceptor was glad to consult on various occasions the æsthetical taste of his pupil. Thus it was that reciprocal mental advantages accrued to both.

Dr. Roberts may have felt that he had not been sufficiently appreciated by Dr. Mott as well as by others who were in a position to aid his professional advancement, and during the latter part of his life, he had, perhaps, become somewhat weaned from his earliest medical associate; but the love he bore his preceptor was so deeply rooted, that time could not extract it, nor disappointment smother it. Dr. R., during most of his early life, unselfishly lent his genius so freely in promoting the welfare of the general profession, of medical institutions and of his friends, as to partially eclipse his own aggrandisement, and this fact, coupled with certain idiosyncrasies of character, prevented his attaining the full measure of popular success, to which he was entitled.

During the years 1828, '29, '30, young Roberts attended medical lectures at the Geneva Medical College, Medical Department of Rutgers University; during the winter of 1830, '31, at Philadelphia, and graduated at the New York College of Physicians and Surgeons, March 25th, 1832. On the 9th of May following, he married Matilda, daughter of Martin Hoffman, Esq., of this city.

At the early age of twenty-two, we find our friend fairly launched into medical and matrimonial life. With a cultivated mind and congenial companion, the world opened upon him with prospects of success and pleas-

ure. In 1839, after seven years of uninterrupted happiness, he was bereaved of his wife, who had borne him two sons and a daughter, and this daughter, at the age of eleven years, he was called upon to part with by a sudden attack of croup. The loss of his wife was a blow from which Dr. R. never recovered. He did not re-marry, and those who knew him well, will remember how constantly and sorrowfully he referred to his early bereavement. Again, in 1869, he was sorely afflicted by the death of a grandson, to whom he was ardently and almost unduly attached. But the love of his family was not wholly expended upon the memory of the departed, for with no less affection he regarded his sons, whom he befriended in every way it was possible to the closing hour of his life. Unfortunately, for a period of years before his decease, he ventured each annual surplus in a mercantile transaction, which proving disastrous, stripped him completely of means, for he had no reserve upon which to draw, and at a time of life when he could barely expect that annual receipts from practice could cover the annual expenditures of living.

It may here be stated that Dr. R. did not ever possess the faculty of accumulating means. This was so, even when early and busily occupied in his profession. He was very moderate in his charges, being exceedingly lenient to the poor, and scarcely less so to those in better circumstances. The pecuniary rewards for his services were altogether less than he deserved, but these he expended as he received them, lavishing them as if a man of means upon those he loved. Such improvidence was indicative of his unselfishness, and though prompted to it by a generous and warm heart,

it nevertheless was a detriment to him during his entire life, and was the occasion to him of many hours of solicitude, especially during his later years.

Dr. Roberts left no memoranda of the positions he had held, or the papers he had written—for the facts in relation to them, I am indebted in part to one of his sons, to Drs. J. B. Kissam, J. L. Vandervoort, and S. S. Purple—of a part also I was personally cognizant.

In 1835, in conjunction with several of his medical friends, he founded the "New York Infirmary for the Diseases of Women and Children," at 361 Broome street. This was doubtless the first special institution of its character established in New York. From lack of funds, its doors had finally to be closed, after a brief existence of great usefulness. Dr. R. took more than usual interest in the welfare of his patients, as well the poor and friendless, as those in a more prosperous condition. As illustrating this point, a quotation may not be inappropriate from a communication recently received from a gentleman, a layman, to whom Dr. R. was warmly attached. He says: "The suffering of women and children appealed to his good heart at once, and found a ready response in acts of sympathetic tenderness. I think I have never seen him more affected than some four months before his death, by the case of a servant girl who came to consult him at his office. He discovered at once that her trouble was cancer, and death in a painful form inevitable. He told me of it with tears in his eyes, and his heart seemed to be wrung with the necessity laid on him to make known to her the heavy tidings."

In 1839, he served as physician for some time at West Point. In 1844, he was physician to the North-

ern Dispensary, having charge of the department, "Diseases of Women and Children and Nervous Disorders." In 1852, he was appointed physician to the City Prison, a position he retained for several years. On May 9th, 1864, he was appointed by the Hon. E. M. Stanton, Secretary of War, as a Surgeon of the Board of Enrollment, 8th Congressional District. His duties here in connection with the Provost Marshall's Office, were to examine recruits, both those drafted into the United States service, and those offered as substitutes.

An arduous and double task was imposed upon him. The country had its claim on the citizen—the citizen had certain rights of exemption from various physical and mental causes—Dr. Roberts stood as arbiter. The citizen desiring to escape military duty, and bounty brokers desiring to press forward unsuitable substitutes, could find in a pliant surgeon, a tool who could connive at their cunning and illicit gain. But the breath of suspicion was never lispied in regard to our departed friend. Had no other motive prompted him, the love of his profession was sufficient to prevent him from ever tarnishing the name of a physician, when occupying either a public or private position of trust. Though exposed to temptations while in this position, I have had it from his own lips a short time before they were sealed in death, that in relinquishing the office at the close of the war, he did so with clean hands and with a conscience void of offense. A prominent politician eulogized the honesty of our friend, by calling him a fool, for having missed such golden opportunities. Dr. Roberts has reaped a richer and higher reward.

On the 16th of July, 1873, he was unexpectedly appointed, through a Fellow of this Academy and Commissioner of Public Parks, as Surgeon to the Central Park Police. In relation to this, it may be interesting to quote a few sentences from a communication received from one of his friends. Mr. P. writes: "For some months before his death, he was greatly troubled by apprehensions of want, when his sickness should render him physically incapable of giving attention to his practice, he longed for some pecuniary certainty that would relieve him of this harrassing care about the future. Just at this time, his friend, Dr. Samuel Hall, came with an offer of the office of police surgeon at Central Park. I saw him the day after this position had been tendered to him; his first words were that a miracle had been performed, and that he was the subject of it; 'to think,' said he, 'that the very thing that I have desired and prayed for by day and by night, should have come to me, is past all comprehension. It must have come from God.' "

It would be impracticable on an occasion like the present, to enumerate the various positions he has held in our local organizations. He has presided over the Alumni Association of the College of Physicians and Surgeons, and been active in several of our societies until the time of his death. At the organization of this Academy, January 12th, 1847, he was elected Domestic Corresponding Secretary, and on the Committee of Publication, on which committee he has long and faithfully served. In 1859, he was appointed Orator. During the last four years of his life, he was Vice-President.

It remains for us to rapidly review the literary

labors of Dr. R. In doing so, I will first briefly allude to his editorial duties. Before attempting this, it would be of interest to give quotations from the letters received by Dr. R. from Dr. Mott, during Dr. M.'s absence in Europe, in 1837-38, but time merely allows this allusion to the correspondence.

In 1841, for about a year, he was editor of the "New York Medical Gazette," and in this journal are to be found two papers from his pen, viz. : "Contributions to the Literary History and Pathology of Cholera Infantum," and on "Thymic Enlargement."

On October 1st, 1846, he established the "Annalist," a journal which he continued to edit until September, 1848. It is interesting at the present day to read the choice selection of monographs which appeared in this periodical, to be awakened by the spicy editorials, and enlightened about the current news of that period in his well digested "Varia." Dr. R. had the happy faculty of weaving polite literature into themes relating to abstruse science, and his pen impressed the beautiful intercurrent flashes of thought which were entwined in his medical researches.

In the "Annalist" for January 15th, 1847, he graphically alluded to the organization of this Academy, and in concluding, said: "May its spirit be ever the same, its course onward, and may it ever exist, a shelter for the good, a warning and terror to the vicious, a stimulus to, and a reward for high and holy purposes and actions, a defender of the true faith, a *decus et tutamen* of American medicine."

In passing, it may be stated that other extracts might be given relating to the advantages which accrued to the medical profession of this city, by the es-

tablishment of this Academy, which would stimulate generosity and efforts at this time, to procure for ourselves a suitable building. This project was a cherished one with the founders of this Academy, and Dr. Mott, at its first regular meeting, was its champion. Dr. R. has faithfully chronicled the teachings of our medical forefathers—they gave to our profession in this city, a status and moral endowment—if true to our ancestors, we must add not only scientific and moral, but also *pecuniary* endowments to the heritage.

In retiring from editorial duties, in September, 1848, Dr. Roberts carried with him the warm wishes of many readers, and the regards and the regrets of his brethren of the press. He received at this time the following *jeu d'esprit*:

“ The editorial chair’s vacated !
 A most unpopular recess ;
 Learning and wit stand half check-mated
 With one amanuensis less.

“ To ’lay the ghost of printers’ devil,
 Dyed *cap à pie* in inky hues,
 ’Twere sure unkind and most uncivil,
 To give us in his stead the *blues*.

“ To such a pen, in fair retort,
 We give our greeting, grateful, hearty—
 Refreshed by rest, be *briefly short*,
 Its *otium cum dignitate*.”

As indicating the relationship which existed between the present distinguished incumbent of our Presidential Chair and Dr. Roberts at this time, I will offer a quotation from a letter sent to him by Dr. Flint, in November, 1847, and dated Buffalo: “ Excuse the liberty which I take in presuming so far upon co-membership of the corps editorial and upon the

many instances of your editorial kindness (for which I beg you to accept my sincere thanks), as to ask you to do me a favor. Your notices of Prof. Agassiz' lectures have given me a great desire to hear him, and as the 'Mountain cannot go to Mahomet,' I should be glad to induce 'Mahomet to come to the Mountain,' etc., etc." This paragraph must suffice to indicate the regard with which he was then esteemed.

Subsequent to the time we have given, Dr. R. did not assume editorial duties, with the exception of editing four or five numbers of "Wood's Addenda to the Medico-Chirurgical Review," between July, 1847, and April, 1849.

I will now glance at his other literary productions. In 1834, in conjunction with Dr. Jas. B. Kissam, he translated Bourguery's "Minor Surgery," the work being affectionately dedicated by the translators to their preceptor, Dr. Mott. In 1835, he translated the work of the Chev. J. Sarlandiere, ex-Surgeon, French Army, and of the Military Hospitals of Paris. It is entitled, "Systematized Anatomy; or, Human Organography, in Synoptical Tables, with numerous Plates for the use of Universities, Faculties, and Schools of Medicine and Surgery, Academies of Paintings, Sculpture, and of the Royal Colleges." This is a large folio volume, very beautifully illustrated with fifteen folio plates.

Dr. R.'s first monograph appeared in April, 1835, and was a popular essay on "Vaccination." Its authorship was designated by the signature, "A Physician." It doubtless was a potent adjuvant in bringing into favor among the people an important prophylactic measure. His subsequent papers, so far as I have been able to gather them, are as follows :

American Journal of Medical Sciences.

Aug., 1837.—“A case of Enlargement of the Thymus Gland, attended with unusual symptoms, and terminating fatally.” (Dr. Roberts was the first in this country to call attention to this disorder.)

Oct., 1841.—Same subject.

Aug., 1840, and Oct., 1841.—“On Diseases of the Fœtus: a contribution towards a better acquaintance with Intra-Uterine Pathology.”

New York Journal of Medicine and Surgery.

1840, Vol. 3.—“Cases of Renal Disease occurring in early infancy, with remarks on the connection between it and some of the Cerebral Affections of Children.”

Vol. 2.—“Cases of Thymic Asthma.”

New York Journal of Medical and Collateral Sciences.

1844.—“Pyretological Inquiries—Gastro-Enteritis as a cause or concomitant of Fever.”

1844.—“On the Isolated Tumor (Tubercle) of the Uterus, commonest in the posterior wall.” (An elaborate paper.)

May, 1845, Nov., 1857, and May, 1858.—“On the Pathology of Leucorrhœa, Fluor Albus, or the Whites, with a detail of the opinions relating to it for the last 170 years, and a notice of the peculiar appearance of the discharge, and an attempt to connect it more directly than has hitherto been generally done, with inflammation of the vagina, cervix and lining membrane of the uterus.” (This is an exhaustive series of papers, and may be regarded as very complete.)

Nov., 1849.—“An Eclectic Essay on the Non-Pediculated Fibro-Scirrhus Fibro-Cartilaginous and Fibro-Calcareous Tumor of the Uterus.” (2d part Jan., 1850.)

Nov., 1857.—“Remarks on the use of Compressed Sponge.” (A letter to Dr. J. P. Batchelder.)

American Medical Gazette.

“Artificial Dilatation of the Os Uteri in Labor.” (A practice advocated and followed by Dr. Roberts with much success.)

Medical Record.

Sept. 15, 1869.—“Pathogenesis and Treatment of Sterility in the Human Female.”

New York Medical Gazette.

1870.—“Catarrhus Æstivus.” (This was a disorder from which Dr. Roberts suffered annually for many years.)

1870.—“Remarks on Syphilization.”

“On Vaccination as a Preventive of Small Pox from its present standpoint.”

“Thoughts on Digestion, as applied to Pædo-Nosology.”

“Contribution to Pædo-Nosology, Encephalitis, Meningitis, Meningo-encephalitis.”

Sept., 1871.—“Antiphlogistic Treatment of Children.”

In the publications of this Academy, are to be found the following papers from the pen of Dr. Roberts:

Anniversary Oration.

1859.—“The Eulogium of Medical Science.”

Bulletin.

“Infectio-contagiousness of Asiatic (Epidemic) Cholera.”

“On Menstruation, its Natural History and Physiology in its relation to Amenorrhœa.”

“On the Causes of Death and Disease in this Metropolis.”

“On Impregnation, Sterility, and Superfoetation.”

“On Scrofulosis.”

“On Pathology of Diabetes Mellitus.”

Besides these essays, Dr. Roberts prepared quite a number of others. A memoir of the late Dr. Joseph Mather Smith, read before this Society February 6th, 1867. Others have doubtless been read before this Academy, or its sections, and have not been published. Several of their manuscripts have been preserved. Others were written for medical or popular journals,

with a view of receiving for them pecuniary compensation. Among these, may be mentioned those entitled "Effects and Influences of the Imagination," "Medical Charlatanry," "A Panoramic Retrospect of the History of Medicine, from the earliest ages to the present day, with notices of the doctrines which have prevailed in, and of the men who have advanced the progress of the science," "The School of Salerno;" and, in addition to these, an address before the Western Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association of this city.

Without presenting these as a complete record of the writings of our deceased friend—the record is sufficient to show his industry and the range of his information—some of the papers of his latter years were somewhat diffuse in their style, but this cannot be said to characterize his productions. Those which he carefully prepared were marvelous for their rhetorical beauty, and oftentimes his sentences were so charmingly rhythmical that it can truthfully be said of him that he was "a writer of poetic prose."

Dr. R. was not an original investigator, either in physiology or pathology, but was well versed in these subjects, and being a keen clinical observer, was peculiarly fitted to draw practical conclusions. His views on the subject of gynecology were regarded as authoritative, and some of his papers on this subject were novel in their nature and early gave him an extended reputation. Did time permit cases might here be enumerated, which he had successfully relieved of sterility, and which had baffled the treatment of the highest medical experts.

It would be an omission if, in alluding to his char-

acteristics, we failed to speak of his powers of extemporaneous speech. With neither voice nor carriage typical of the orator, nevertheless at inspired moments, without premeditation, he could rise to his feet and carry with him the feelings of his auditors. Choice in the selection of words, without hesitation, his lips gave utterance to his passing thoughts and expression to his ripe scholarship. He was specially happy in extemporaneous eulogy, and has in this hall, on the spur of the moment, pronounced such panegyric as to receive from our Fellows the warmest encomiums.

Dr. R. was an excellent general practitioner, accurate in diagnosis and judicious in his use of remedial agents. In emergencies his action was prompt and efficient. In the diseases of women and in difficult cases of obstetrics he was often called as the consulting physician.

During a considerable portion of his life he was busily employed in professional duties, but he failed to acquire a very large or at least a very lucrative practice. Such failure was in part attributable to the fact that he was excessively conscientious. Every day experience shows the difficulty in making a diagnosis, especially in the early stages of disease. Dr. R., very properly being unwilling to commit himself, lest the future should show his error, was led to give so many reasons for non-committalism that it impaired his usefulness, giving rise to the suspicion that he was unqualified to treat the case. But, in spite of such peculiarity, he had a number of warmly-attached intelligent patients; having become acquainted with his idiosyncrasies, they learned that he had knowledge and judgment to guide him in the management of their disorders.

The conversational powers of our friend were of an unusual order. We all remember how, at social gatherings, he could instruct and playfully entertain a group of friends—for he was generally a center on such occasions. Who was quicker either in pun or in repartee; who could venture an anecdote or poetical, historical or classical allusion, but in the twinkling of an eye he was ready with a fitting companion piece or a striking antithesis. Humor was an inherent part of his nature—a smile nestled and sparkled in his eye, beamed in his countenance, and animated his conversation. While specially worshipping at the shrines of Hygiæa and Æsculapius he was scarcely less a devotee of Clio, Thalia, Calliope, and the other muses. Enriched by inspirations from such divinities, his gifted mind was a constant source of pleasure to himself and to his associates.

It has been my custom for several years, as it was of several of the Fellows of this Academy, to visit him at his residence. Tapestryed carpets did not adorn his apartment, gilded mirrors did not reflect choice works from the easel, or marbles from the sculptor's hands—these we can find in many apartments where they form almost the chief attraction. But in Dr. Roberts was to be found a warm friend, a genial companion, a living object of *virtu*. You will remember him seated in his arm-chair after his cordial salutation, with head bent attentively forward. Let his guest recite to him some choice thought as culled from reading, or perchance a novel original conception, in a moment his hands were outstretched, his head elevated, his eye sparkled as he exclaimed, how beautiful! and his visitor had but to wait for an instant for his still more beautiful echo. His

cultivated sense of the beautiful, either in language, landscape or work of art was so keen, that on contemplating them, his frame fairly thrilled with emotion, and such refined sensibility was a constant source of delight.

He was a rare combination, for reclusion and convivial gatherings both afforded him intense pleasure. Unlike the cloistered book-worm, who reads without appreciation, his mind feasted on literature, and he could leave the secluded delights of his study to enjoy the feast of reason and flow of soul at social reunions. With varied intellectual tastes, we can easily appreciate the grave difficulties which beset him in youth when selecting his future vocation. We can readily imagine that the muses of History and Poetry mourned as they saw him join the retinue of Æsculapius, and that these and kindred spirits, though losing his chief allegiance, nevertheless failed not to give him benediction and talismanic guidance through life.

Dr. Roberts was a man *sui generis*. We read of the coteries which were held at diverse times during a by-gone but not forgotten period of English literature. It has often struck me, in contemplating Dr. R., what a genial companion he would have been at such gatherings.

Cowley and Dryden, Prior and Pope, Burns, Addison and Parnell, were centers around whom clustered the wits, geniuses, and titled of their times; but these, and many of their associates, were injured by their intemperate habits, while Prior was openly scandalous in his lustful debaucheries.

Dr. R. possessed many of the mental attributes which history accords to these authors, but he eclipsed

them, for he was free from their vices. In regulating the actions of his life, any undue bibulous propensity was checked by temperance, any lecherous tendency was restrained by chastity.

Early in his career acquiring studious habits, and prevented for a long period by business from prosecuting his researches during the day, he became accustomed to employ hours "In the silent watches of the night, calm night that breedeth thoughts."

Refreshed by his favorite draught, a cup of coffee, and calmed by the fumes of tobacco, if pressed for time, or if his theme was of interest, he heeded not the call for rest which his weary body demanded. This custom, early established, he continued late in life.

Dr. Roberts was warm in his attachments, and incapable of entertaining bitter animosity. There was one class of persons, however, toward whom he felt a sovereign contempt, and in speaking of such he was choice in the selection of opprobrious epithets. I refer to medical charlatans, or to those who, while still within the pale of the regular profession, are its mere parasites and are guilty of unbecoming conduct. The code of medical ethics, like the Decalogue, was written indelibly on the tablets of his mind, and as guides to him they were almost alike sacred.

Regarding Dr. R. in whatever aspect we may, either for rectitude, learning or affability, we cannot fail to recognize that he was an extraordinary man. Could Dickens have portrayed his character to the world, the world would have admired his industry and genius, been amused at his idiosyncrasies and sparkling wit, have wept at his tenderness to the poor and friendless, and mourned at his death as for a friend.

We have thus, Mr. President, briefly passed in review the principal events in the life of our departed friend : too briefly, indeed, for a life which had reached a period of nearly three-score and ten years. It must be remembered, however, that his writings will be his enduring monuments ; few extraordinary occurrences were conspicuous in his career, and the duties incident to the routine of daily life, though they were so faithfully performed as to endear him to his family and friends, are not fitting subjects for extended public recital.

It remains for us to allude to his religious character, and to the closing scenes of his life. Many years ago Dr. R. was confirmed, and became a communicant in the Episcopal Church. He made no ostentatious display of his religious feelings. His philosophical mind weighed as thoughtfully theological matters, as it did subjects relating to science. In both he had an abiding faith. For some months before his decease he felt that death was approaching. Secluded from female society, missing the gentle ministrations of wife and daughters, Dr. R., in the solitude of his office, spent many hours, pensively meditating on the past and on the mysterious eternity ; but he was strengthened by his meditations, and cheered by one of his warm personal friends and patients with such bright hopes and anticipations for the future, that death was coveted rather than feared.

As showing how he communed in thought, the following memoranda, found after his death among his private papers, may be very properly inserted : "Sept. 11, 1871.—Enter 61st year in good health, but suffering from my catarrh of forty years ; thankful to God for past favors, and hopeful for the future."

“ Feb. 11 '73.—Visible weakness, pulse 160 and irregular, great oppression in breathing, frequent palpitation, asthma and complete despondency as to the future. I thank my merciful Creator for His mercy in relieving me so soon, and I pray to Him for yet some length of days and usefulness without suffering. Amen. I have been *very ill*; perhaps I have the seeds of a mortal disease, but my recovery has been prompt and promising, and I offer my most devout and grateful thanks to Almighty God.” Again, referring to the distressing symptoms from which he was suffering, he concluded: “*Finis appropinquet—sed haud timeo, in Salvatore meo confido.*”

It was in February, 1873, that I was called to see him professionally in conjunction with Dr. Cheesman, and it was but too evident he was suffering with an organic affection of the heart. Dyspnœa was urgent, and insomnolency from such suffering was most distressing. For quite a period before this time he had partaken irregularly of his meals, had drunk perhaps inordinately of strong coffee, and had indulged too freely in smoking. Inquisitive about his condition, it became necessary at an early period to inform him that a *cardiac bruit* was distinctly audible; but for reasons we have just stated, he at first regarded such *souffle* as indicative rather of anæmia than of organic disease. By regulating the habits of his life, etc., Dr. R. was again placed in a decidedly more comfortable condition. Repeated attacks of dyspnœa and continued irregularities of the heart's action doubtless early convinced him that he was suffering from an organic affection, and he came to the same view of his case as had been early entertained by his medical attendants.

For most of the time from February to December, Dr. R. was enabled to attend to his practice, to his duties as Police Surgeon, and to the sessions of several of the medical societies to which he was attached. The prospect of confinement to the house, with protracted suffering from his organic disease, was often the occasion of mental anxiety ; but it was ordained that his evil forebodings were not to be realized.

On the 30th of November he attended a case of midwifery, and was detained over night. On the following day he reported at the Central Park, and returned to his office completely overcome from extreme exhaustion. From here he was taken to the residence of a son who had just removed to New York. Here, in the course of a few days, his life gently ebbed away. Sons and their families affectionately watched him and ministered to his wants, and a number of his medical friends took pleasure in uniting with his relatives in kindly offices. No agonizing throes or paroxysms of dyspnœa disturbed his final hours. While more comfortable, and choosing the sitting posture, the distress he experienced was incident simply to extreme exhaustion. On the 9th of December, 1873, the final gasp was given, and the heart gently ceased to beat, the departing spirit giving a kindly farewell to its tenement of clay. His earnest desire for a euthanasia was granted.

Thus passed away our friend and associate, Dr. Roberts. He had but few ties of kindred, but at his funeral was gathered a company as remarkable for its respectability as for its goodly number—his sorrowing family, a large representation of the medical profession of this community, warmly attached patients—while

the Police of the Central Park requested that they might be represented, which request was granted by the Commissioners, and their deputation, with love and regard, bore the coffin of their benefactor.

Another asterisk has been added to our list of members to indicate the death of a Fellow—another star has been added on high to the galaxy of the “Gathered Fathers.”

This Academy has had its large proportion of those who have finished their careers at a ripe period, exemplars of learning, exemplars of pillared rectitude. We possess no sacred edifice in which to gather the dust of our cherished dead, but our hearts are abbeys, in which are embalmed hallowed memories of our departed worthies.

RESOLUTIONS OF THE NEW YORK ACADEMY OF MEDICINE.

AT a special meeting of the New York Academy of Medicine, held in the lecture-room of St. Mark's Church, December 12th, 1873, a committee, consisting of Drs. G. M. Smith, Oliver White, and John L. Vandervoort, presented the following preamble and resolutions, which were unanimously adopted :

Whereas, It has pleased an all-wise Providence, to remove by death, William C. Roberts, M.D., Vice-President of the New York Academy of Medicine, therefore,

Resolved, That the Fellows of the Academy are called upon to mourn the loss of an associate, loved for his social qualities, respected for his courtesy and rectitude, and honored for his erudition.

Resolved, That the Fellows will ever pleasantly recall the brilliancy of his wit, the readiness of his anecdotal illustrations, the richness of his poetical and classical learning, and the happy fluency of his extempore speech.

Resolved, That the numerous productions of his pen will not only be an enduring monument of his industry, but will also permanently perpetuate the clearness of his acumen, the force of his logic, and the ripeness of his scholarship.

Resolved, That the Fellows attend his funeral in a body, and that a copy of these resolutions be engrossed in the minutes of the Academy, be presented to the family, and be printed in the medical journals of this city.

AUSTIN FLINT, M.D., *President*.

W. T. WHITE, M.D., *Secretary*.

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